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CRITICAL NOTES

THE EXPERIENTIAL THEOLOGY

It is a coincidence which seems to call for some notice from me that Professor Coe's article in the last number of this *Journal*, upon "Modern Psychology and Regeneration," in which he refers in kindly criticism to my *Christian Life and Theology*, immediately precedes my own article, upon "Miracles," in which I occupy a different theological standpoint from that occupied in the book. I shall not attempt to explain now how I have come to a change in my position, except to say that I have always been trying to learn as I have studied, and seem now to myself to have made radical progress; but a criticism upon the whole experiential theology from one who once embraced it may be calculated to throw some light upon it.

Professor Coe's direct reference to myself is, as I have intimated, of the kindest sort; but I am not inclined entirely to accept his criticism. I said that regeneration "upon its merely human side, is the permanent choice of duty." He objects to the abstractness of "duty as such" as the object of the Christian choice. I have not maintained that it is commonly or, indeed, ever chosen in this abstract form, although that could be maintained of certain examples in academic circles. I have simply put this as the common element *involved* in all forms of the Christian surrender to God. The choice, however it may be conceived by the individual, is a matter of consciousness, and needs nothing but the clarification of a little analysis to become the conscious choice of duty as such. It is also a *permanent* choice, for one cannot truly choose duty, as duty, for any limited period; and this is also a matter of consciousness in the sense that the Christian knows that he *intends* permanence, though of course he is not conscious, and cannot be, of the actual permanence through the future of this or of any other choice. I think it will be found that the word "conscious" is employed in the book with strict accuracy throughout. At a later point in the book (pp. 133 ff.) I have dwelt upon the concrete forms which the experience of conversion actually takes.

I cannot speak with so much satisfaction of the criticism which Professor Coe has made upon the school of experiential writers as a whole. Of the six questions (and very excellently chosen ones) which he says should be asked by such writers of themselves, and must be asked by their

critics, in the scrutiny of their data, he says, "It is doubtful if any one of them has been faithfully observed by any writer who has used the argument. Indeed, what passes in these arguments as description of empirical data . . . is little more than a description of supposed experiences in terms of a preconceived theory." This is partially true, as I shall explain later. It is true that the "possible negative cases" which Professor Coe says, with great truth and force, ought to be "searched for" and "explained," have been entirely neglected. I shall show why. But "measures *have* been taken to secure universally representative facts as distinguished from denominational types of experience" by these writers. In the course of one of these analyses in my own book (p. 53) it is remarked in a note: "To all these epitomes of individual experience historic names might be attached." The brief paragraph is the result of wide reading in narratives of conversion and of long observation of Christian people in many diverse regions. Professor William James has conducted a large part of his investigations in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* by the study of carefully selected "personal documents." He quotes largely from Tolstoy, Bunyan, Finney, Brainerd, etc., etc. It is in a similar way that the writers upon religious experience as a Christian evidence have collected their facts. And it is a strong confirmation of their success in getting at real facts that they have so largely agreed. Frank, Professor at Erlangen, was an "old" Lutheran; Stearns was by training a Presbyterian; R. S. Foster, a Methodist; F. H. Foster, a "new school" Congregationalist: and yet there is a remarkable likeness of statement between them. Certainly "dogma" did not make a German sacramentarian Lutheran university man and an American Methodist bishop agree!

I do not think, therefore, that Professor Coe has done justice to his opponents, though he has meant to; but his failure at this point is of little importance in comparison with the correctness of his general criticism that their study has not been sufficiently objective as manifested particularly by their neglect of the negative cases. I shall sharpen this criticism still more and say that the fundamental error of the whole school lies in their having *assumed* that Christianity is a unique phenomenon in the religious world. It is certainly scientific to segregate a class of cases for a special examination when they have a common distinguishing trait; and there can be no objection to examining the large class of men who profess conversion for the discovery of their peculiarities or for determining what those peculiarities have to teach us in the world of systematic theology. But this has not been the simple and scientific attitude of these investigators. They have assumed the existence of a "world of evil" as opposed to the church,

and have made the former the object of God's displeasure as the church is the organization of his kingdom and the home of his forgiven and accepted children. But *are* converted men the only men with whom God is pleased? They are, if the world is essentially evil, if the church is a company of men rescued out of the ruin impending over all, if the agency of the rescue is God himself, and if God has thus done for some men what he has not done for others and thereby introduced some into a state in which none are found who have not been thus introduced. But this is the question of the personally selective action of God, of his supernatural interference in the course of history, of special revelation, and of miracle. To presuppose this is really to presuppose the answer of the whole apologetic problem. Apologetically, this argument *begs the question*. That is its great condemnation.

Hence the neglect of the negative cases. Here is a man whom his neighbors would call a religious man, who is interested in the church, who does good, who has the same moral struggles that other men have, and sometimes stands firm in the hour of temptation when converted men fall, who says, however, that he was never converted, who has no experience of prayer and who is conscious of no special and divine help in the conflicts of life. How will the experiential apologist explain such a case? He does not suppose himself to be under any necessity of explaining it. It is non-Christian and has nothing to do with his argument, which is the development of the meaning of *Christian* experience, which alone is truly normal and divine. So he thinks, because he thinks that Christianity is divinely unique. Of one thing he feels sure, that, if the experience of the man is actually as described, he is not pleasing to God, not an heir of heaven, and not at all certain to persevere in the morality which he has apparently attained: and this harsh criticism the apologist passes, not out of lack of charity or because of his personal hardness, but because he believes in the divine uniqueness of Christianity and in the moral worthlessness of everything which falls short of complete conscious surrender to God.

But if this presupposition is dropped, the question recurs, What is religion and what is a religious man? a question upon which Professor Coe's article gives us many valuable hints. Certainly there is found in every man a desire of happiness, which in certain relations becomes merged in the desire of the good and the right. Now and then men generally perceive that the right course is the course which leads to happiness. Suppose any man, even the lowest, to perceive the desirability of right doing in any case. He chooses it. Is such a choice pleasing in any sense to God? In the physical sphere obedience to natural law, even the most trifling, by the

most constant violator of it, will immediately result in some degree of well-being. May it not be so in the moral? Is not such a man more likely to perceive the desirability of right doing tomorrow for what he has done today? Has he not begun what is *potentially*, under the influence of his implanted tendencies, an upward course, by this one right choice? Take the man by his side, in similar circumstances, who has been "converted," and in what respect do you find him to differ? What warrant has God for *his* persevering in the right way, for the "permanence" of *his* choice which he has not for the other's, except in God's own purpose to carry him on by divine action upon him? But are not the operations of the man's natural tendencies, etc., *also divine*? If we leave the special divine operation of God out of the account, the most orthodox of all theologians would say, that the prospects of the unconverted and the converted man are equally bright. Then why are they not equally pleasing to God?

It seems to me that here is a waiting field for the investigations of the religious psychologist. When I was teaching systematic theology, I taught it for ten years upon the basis of experience, beginning with the experience of the new birth as the starting-point. I had about come to the conclusion to abandon this method of approach to the subject (as I certainly should today), because I found a very unsatisfactory attitude in most of my students to the question of this fundamental experience. Is it possible that there are many people, especially among the young, and more particularly yet, among those who have recently passed through our colleges, who have never been "converted" and have little of the old forms of Christian experience, who are yet on God's side in this world, and are maintaining as successfully as the rest the struggle with temptation and the performance of good? That is a very important question. If a proper *questionnaire* bearing upon this point could be sent to some thousands of present college seniors, it might unearth facts of great value. And if another *questionnaire* addressed to those who positively object to the church, asking for the reason of this objection, and then searching out the elementary facts of the religious life of such objectors, could be scattered among men at both ends of the intellectual series, among college men, graduate and non-graduate, and among the working men who gather in our labor unions and who maintain so active a life of thought upon a wide range of subjects, it is probable that a great service to religion would be thereby performed. It would soon be evident whether the church is unique in the sense of our experiential theologians or not.

I wish, if the patience of my reader is not exhausted, to add one thing more by way of "retraction." I presented the argument from experi-

ence to the divinity of Christ (summarized upon p. 141) in this form, that the Christian refers all those activities which give him his experiential proof of the existence of God, to Christ as well as to God; hence, if they prove the existence of God, they also prove the divinity of Christ. I now regard that argument as fallacious in that it is impossible for the Christian to say that his reference of the phenomena to Christ is legitimate. Making such a reference, he undoubtedly experiences the divine blessing; but so does the devotee of Mary in Catholic churches when he ascribes to her attributes that are divine. The reference may be a mistaken one in the one case as in the other. Man is feeling for God in both cases. God honors man's approach according to its intention, not according to its intellectual correctness.

FRANK HUGH FOSTER

OLIVET, MICH.

HETZENAUER'S EDITION OF THE VULGATE

It is curious that there is no accessible official edition of the Vulgate which corresponds to our authorized edition of the Holy Scriptures. For though the Council of Trent decreed that an authentic text of the Vulgate should be issued, and both Sixtus V and Clement VIII carried out the decree, copies of their editions are very rare, and there has been no authorized Vulgate published at the Vatican Press since. The various copies of the Vulgate now in circulation are by private editors with the authority of their bishops, taken indeed from one or other of the three editions of Clement VIII; but they are neither free from mistakes, nor do they adhere to the authorized text in spelling or punctuation. Dr. Hetzenauer, professor of biblical exegesis in the Roman Seminary of St. Anollinaris, has now edited with the utmost care the Clementine Vulgate. He has given fifteen years' laborious study to the work; in conjunction with a band of zealous associates he has carefully reproduced the smallest details, that it may be absolutely correct; he has gone over the proofsheets seven times before the work was published; he has noted such small and apparently insignificant points as the division of words, the ligature of letters, the form of an "s" or an "i," the use of capital or small letters, besides the spelling of words, the punctuation of the text, and the division of verses. He has even chosen type which should be the same size as that used in the second edition of 1593. This work has been partially done with great accuracy by Cardinal Vercellone, but he took for his text the first edition of 1592. Dr. Hetzenauer gives us the variations of the three editions issued by Clement VIII, and constructs a critical text from their comparison. For this purpose he lays